



## **Senior Service America's Digital Inclusion Initiative**

Between November 2009 and December 2011, Senior Service America's Digital Inclusion Initiative (DII) has helped seniors from all walks of life learn the computer and use the Internet. Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) participants work at hundreds of publicly accessible sites as peer coaches, helping other seniors become competent and comfortable with computers. Participation in the DII is free and open to all persons age 55 or older.

Learners use the Generations on Line self-paced tutorial program designed for older adults. SCSEP peer coaches provide one-on-one assistance to the learners, combining high tech with high touch in a cordial and relaxed environment. Learners work through the GoL 23-item skills checklist at their own pace, starting with use of the mouse and ending with using links and other Internet skills. Those who complete the entire checklist are recognized as DII "graduates."

The following information describes the DII and summarizes its results through the end of 2011.

### **Coaching Sites**

- Total of 354 coaching sites in nonprofit and public agencies in 16 states (329 are currently operating).
- Nearly one-fourth are senior centers, 20 percent are libraries, nine percent are One-Stop Career Centers, five percent are senior housing complexes, and three percent are Area Agencies on Aging. The remainder includes faith-based organizations, community action agencies, and other service organizations.
- About 40 percent of the coaching sites are located in rural areas.

### **Senior Learners**

- The DII has served more than 24,000 older learners in just over two years.
- Learners' median age is 67 years, 54 percent have a high school diploma or less, and 41 percent have annual incomes below \$15,000. Two-thirds are women and more than one-third are nonwhite.
- By the end of 2011 nearly two-thirds of learners had mastered the skills to create and use an email account, search for information on the Internet, and navigate through websites – the "graduates."
- Program experience indicates that 75-80 percent of all learners will be graduates.

### **Peer Coaches**

- More than 550 SCSEP participants have served as peer coaches.
- Their median age is 62 years. More than three-fourths (77 percent) have family incomes below the federal poverty level and 39 percent have no higher than a high school diploma.
- More than a third (37 percent) are nonwhite and 70 percent are female.

### **Effectiveness of the DII: Instrumental Computer and Internet Skills**

- The DII has a high success rate in helping seniors master the computer and Internet. The open-entry open-exit program has a strong retention rate, with more than 80 percent of learners attending five or more coaching sessions.
- Graduates attended an average of six coaching sessions, each lasting an average of 1.75 hours.

- DII graduates spent an average of 35 days between their first and last coaching sessions.

Learners voluntarily completed questionnaires at each coaching session. Analysis of the survey responses from approximately 10,000 learners who completed the initial and final questionnaires provides **strong evidence of the program's effectiveness in promoting computer and Internet skills.**

- Learners' comfort level in using the Internet increased significantly with the number of sessions attended.
- Multivariate analysis of these data indicates that a senior's comfort level in using the Internet is significantly related to four factors: being a DII graduate, the number of sessions attended, frequency of computer use, and younger age.

### **Effectiveness of the DII: Mental Well-being**

Other questionnaire items assessed the impact of the DII on learners' attitudes. **The DII experience has a strong positive impact on older learners' mental and emotional well-being.** Paired comparisons of learners' responses show statistically significant improvements (95 percent confidence level) across all 10 standard attitudinal measures. Among these improvements were the following:

- Based on a five-point scale, 38 percent of learners had higher **life satisfaction** at the end of the DII, compared to only 13 percent who expressed lower satisfaction.
- Perceptions of the **current situation of most older people** improved for 37 percent of learners, while the perceptions of only 10 percent declined between the beginning and end of the DII.
- Nearly 34 percent had a more positive response to the statement that **things were getting worse as they got older**, compared to only 21 percent whose responses were less optimistic.
- A substantial number of learners expressed more positive attitudes (29 percent) about **making a contribution to society** after completing the DII. In contrast, only 16 percent had a more negative orientation.
- While not as dramatic, 30 percent of learners improved their attitude about **feeling old and tired**, although the attitudes of 23 percent worsened between the beginning and end of the DII.
- A **sense of purpose in one's life** was higher for 24 percent of learners and lower for 18 percent between the initial and final DII sessions.
- Finally, the DII was related to improvement in **feeling useful most of the time** for 28 percent of learners, compared to 19 percent who were more negative by the end of the DII experience.

### **General Conclusion**

**The responses of nearly 10,000 learners who completed the entire DII tutorial provide clear evidence that this Initiative is an effective way to help seniors learn to use the computer and become proficient in accessing the Internet. The DII learning model for older adults involves peer coaching, one-on-one assistance, a consumer-directed self-paced tutorial program, open entry and exit for unlimited opportunity to attend the sessions, a congenial age-sensitive learning environment, and a self-assessed competency-based skills checklist. Multivariate analysis of learners' questionnaire responses indicate that those who complete the DII tutorial – about 75-80 percent of all initial learners -- have significantly greater levels of comfort in using the Internet. In addition, as measured by 10 separate indicators, the DII is significantly associated with improved mental and emotional well-being for a substantial proportion of DII graduates.**

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